G Down The Staff

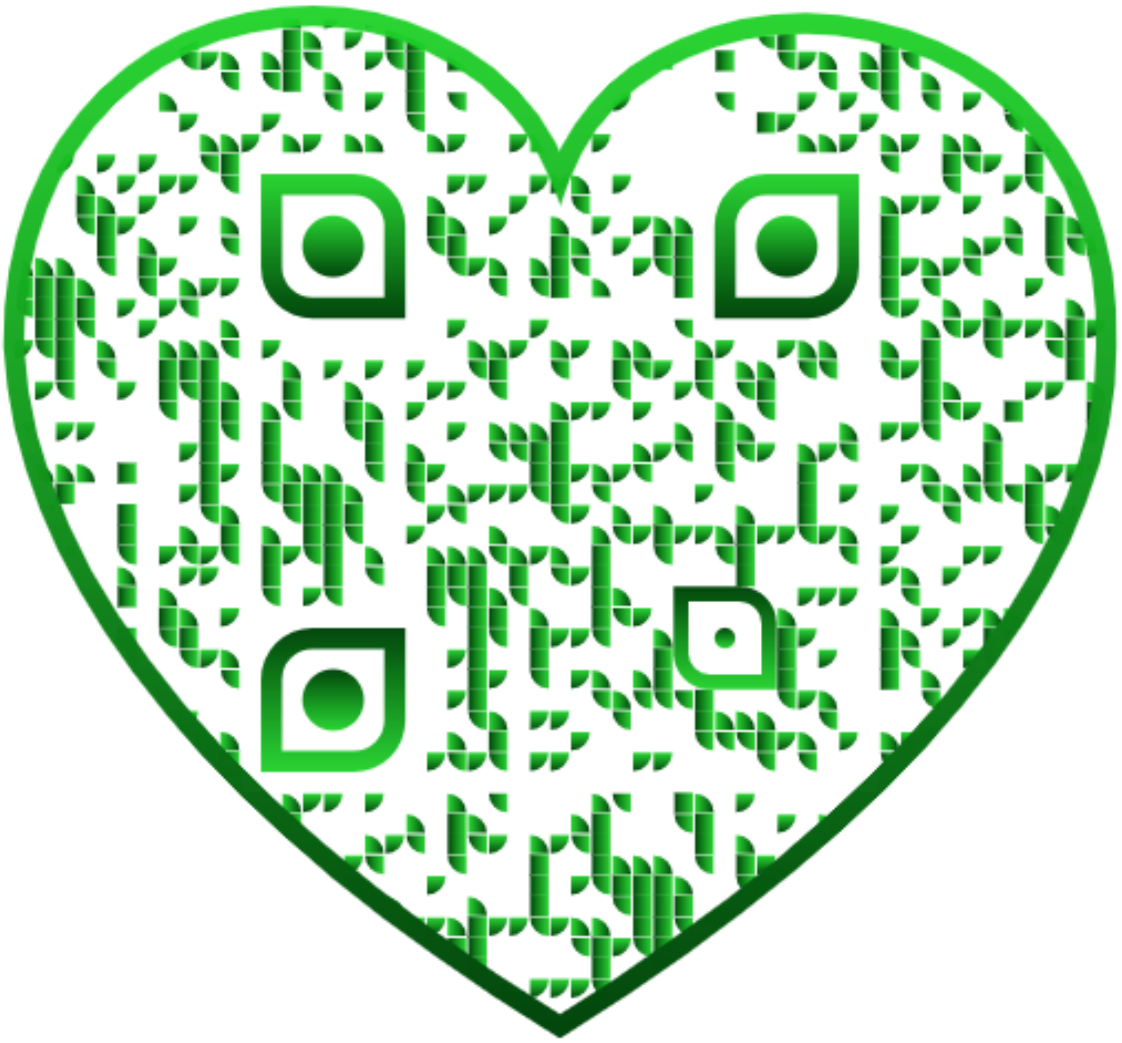
BLUES

'Moon Goin' Down.' By Bob Brozman

One of my favorite blues musicians, probably *the* favorite, is Charley Patton. He pioneered a group of blues tunes that Son House called "*A* down the staff." In this case, we'll have to call it *G* down the staff. It's a whole family of tunes such as "High Water Everywhere" and "Moon Goin' Down," and it employs a descending bass line in octaves combined with thumb snapping on the low string.

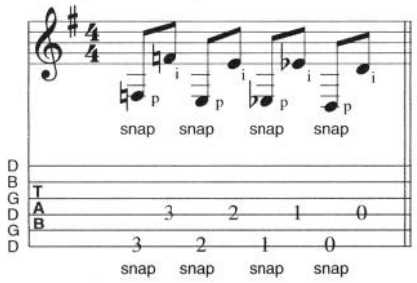
Just in this small department of blues there's a wide range of sounds you can create. The technique involves the sixth and fourth strings answering each other as they're fretted downwards from the 3rd fret to the open string. The old blues players used to reach under the sixth string with their thumb and snap it back against the fingerboard (Ex. 1).

That technique is very dramatic and won't harm your guitar in any way. Where the vari-

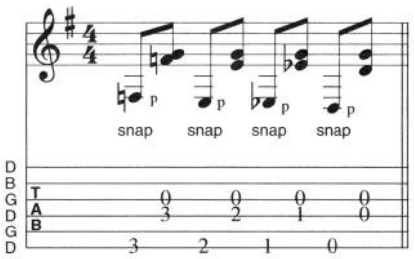


ety comes in is how you place those beats. On some of Charley Patton's records and also Willie Brown's "Future Blues" the snap stroke is the downbeat (**Ex. 2**).

Ex. 1 Open-*G* tuning



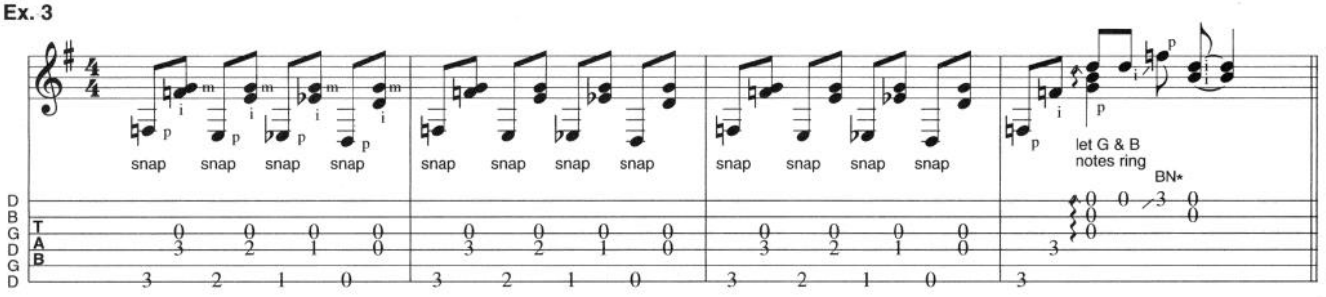
Ex. 2



Notice on that response to the snap, I'm letting the open *G* (third string) sound as well. It's very important to have that in there.

Playing the lick with the snaps on the downbeat sounds like **Ex. 3**:

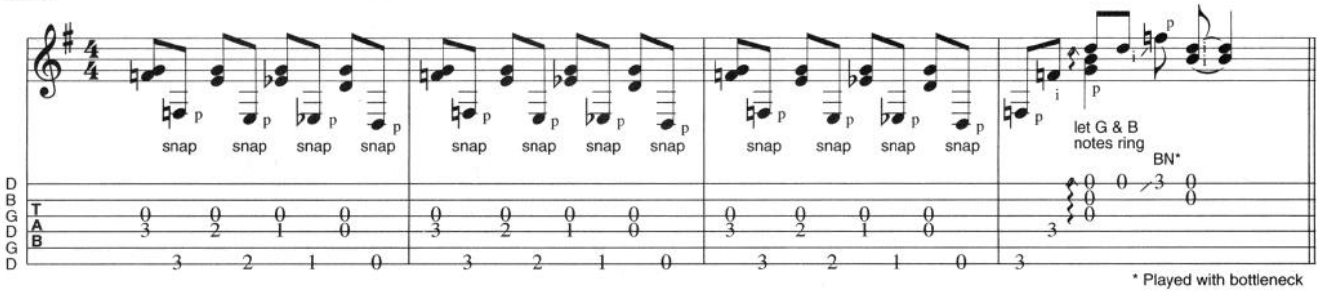
Ex. 3



To get that lost seventh note that's on the 3rd fret (first string), you have to adjust the pattern a little bit.

You can then take this lick and turn it upside down (**Ex. 4**). You'll have to make a slight rhythmic adjustment at the end of the four bars. Begin on the fourth string (index finger) and third string (middle finger), and then answer with snaps.

Ex. 4



It may sound a little "bare bones" at the moment, but it's a great accompaniment for singing.

Here's my arrangement of a great old blues tune, "Moon Goin' Down" (**Ex. 5**). Note that I've combined fretting and bottleneck, starting on the third beat of measure 4. There's also a cool lick you might want to try: the "rake" at the end of measure 4. Fret the chord and play the notes with a free rhythm, using a raking upstroke.

Note that in "Moon Goin' Down," we've added a famous Charley Patton/Willie Brown lick (**Ex. 6**). It's one of my favorites because it's so primitive and bare-chested. Once you get a feel for the whole tune, really lay into it and let it wail. ■

This lesson is reprinted from Bob Brozman's book Rhythm in the Blues *by permission of Crossroads Music Co. The book and accompanying 90-minute audiotape are available in the U.K. and may be ordered from the U.S. and Canada for $29.95 (money order only; no checks). The cost includes airmail delivery. Write to:*

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'Moon Goin' Down'

Traditional
Arranged by Bob Brozman

Ex. 5 Open-*G* tuning

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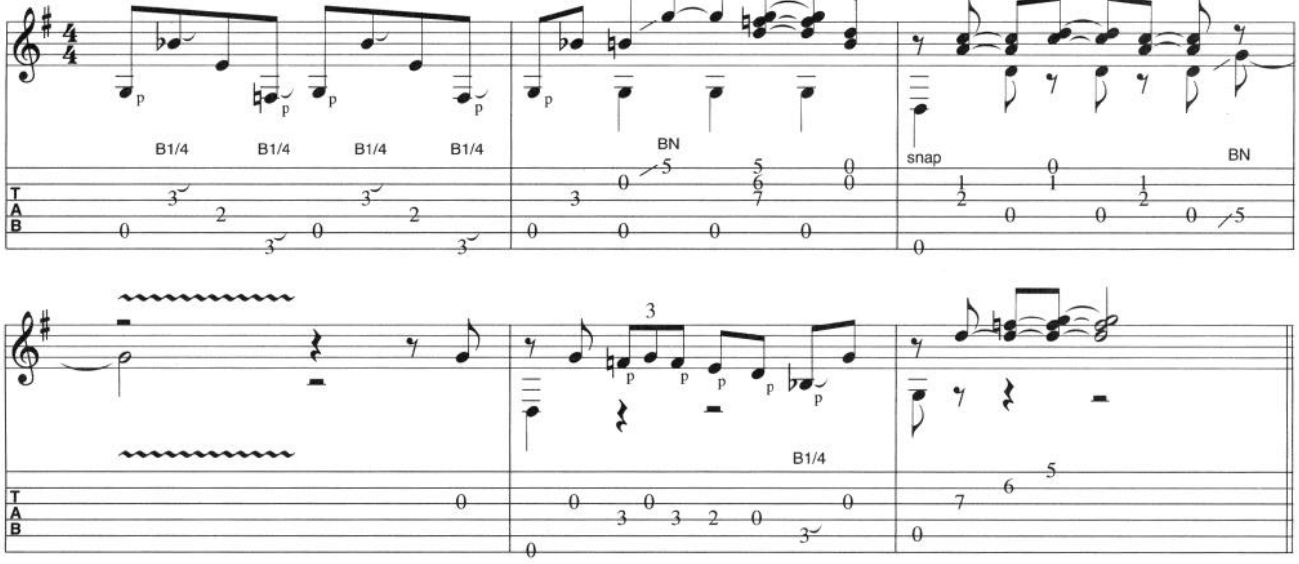
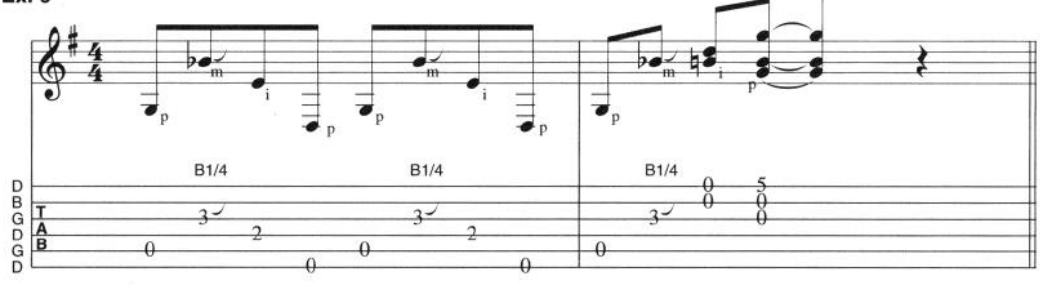
"Moon Goin' Down" continued



Ex. 6